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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000157

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: VATICAN EXPECTS REACTION TO POPE'S LETTER TO CHINESE
FAITHFUL

REF: AMCONSUL HONG KONG 002696

VATICAN 00000157 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, Charge, Embassy
Vatican.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: According to Holy See MFA Country Director for PRC Rota Graziosi, the Holy See still anticipates a reaction to the Pope's June 2007 letter to the Chinese faithful and will watch upcoming bishop ordinations for a sign of the GOC's mind-set. The Holy See does not expect the underground and official churches to unify anytime in the near future conceding that it will take time for the two sides to reconcile. Separately, Becket Institute China expert Rafaela Schmid indicated Cardinal Zen was indeed being frozen out by the Holy See and that his action to "retranslate" the China version of the Pope's letter was necessary to more accurately reflect the Pope's admiration and appreciation for the sacrifices made by underground church members, a facet which had been toned down in the Vatican's Chinese version. End Summary.

No GOC Reaction to Papal Letter . . . Yet

12. (C) Monsignor Gianfranco Rota Graziosi told us October 23 that the GOC has so far not reacted in any measurable way to the Pope's June 30 letter to China's faithful. Rota Graziosi said that with the conclusion of the October Party Congress in Beijing, a more overt reaction to the Papal Letter might be forthcoming depending on the tack taken by the newly installed PRC leadership team. He believes that the Catholic Patriotic Association (PA) has 5 or 6 bishop candidates ready now for ordination and will watch closely to see how the PA handles those ordinations for any signs - good or bad.

13. (C) Separately, Rome-based China expert Rafaela Schmid of the Becket Institute told us that the GOC desperately wants to show the world that they think the Papal Letter is unimportant

and will most probably ignore it as a result. Schmid thought the PA might send a subtle message to the Holy See by the speed of its episcopal ordinations. They will speed up illegal episcopal ordinations if they want to signal their displeasure said Schmid.

Pope's Exhortation for Unified Church Will Take Time

¶4. (C) Asked whether underground or official church officials had reacted to the Pope's exhortations to unify into one church, Rota Graziosi said "no" and indicated the Holy See had not expected a measurable reaction from either side in the short-term. We expect it will take some time for both sides to heed the Pope's guidance said Rota Graziosi. We have, however, a high degree of assurance that the Pope's letter is in the hands of all church officials and that the Pope's guidance is being given careful consideration. "Like all things in China," said Rota Graziosi, "this too shall take time."

¶5. (C) The Becket Institute's Schmid told us that the unification of the two churches will be a long-term process. The general reaction from the underground church has been negative and the faithful are confused about whom they should listen to said Schmid. The Pope's message will be especially difficult for those underground officials who are raising funds under the "persecution" banner. Obviously, they will be reluctant to change their ways.

VATICAN 00000157 002.2 OF 002

Bishops Reluctant to Assume Chairmanship Position

¶6. (C) Addressing the issue of a successor to the position of Chairman of the Catholic Patriotic Association, which was most, recently held by the late Bishop Michael Fu Tieshan Chairman, Schmid said that she thought the PA would have a very difficult time convincing any bishop to take the post. Most, if not all the bishops wish to remain in good standing with Rome and will try to avoid taking any overt steps to separate themselves from Rome.

Cardinal Zen: The X Factor

¶7. (C) Schmid mentioned that Cardinal Zen had rightfully pointed out the weaknesses in the Holy See's translation of the Pope's letter from the Italian original to Chinese and that his translation was a truer reflection of the Pope's words. She told us that many in the Holy See and the greater Catholic Church misunderstand Zen who she said is actually working from the center to reconcile both churches in the PRC. He is not

just an advocate for the underground church as many think. This is a person who taught in an official church institution and understands and appreciates both sides' sentiments in this delicate situation. "It is too bad he has been frozen out by the Holy See," said Schmid.

18. (C) Schmid revealed that her recent interview with Cardinal Zen in "First Things", taken together with her unauthorized production of the film "God in China" earlier in 2007 had resulted in direct and indirect threats from certain officials in China and she doubted if she would ever be allowed to return to the PRC.
ROONEY